REPORTING THE MALUKU SECTARIAN CONFLICT: THE POLITICS
OF EDITORSHIP IN KOMPAS AND REPUBLIKA DAILIES

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This thesis entitled

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Abstract

This research explores the politics of editorship in the *Kompas* and *Republika* dailies in covering conflict between Muslims and Christians in Maluku. It is attempting to answer why the two most prominent Indonesian newspapers cover the same event differently. As a Catholic-affiliated newspaper, *Kompas* defended the Christian interests; and as a Muslim newspaper, *Republika* defended the Muslim interests. Two approaches are employed here to understand the two newspapers’ difference in reporting. The first approach is philosophical framework underpinning the theory of interpretation, known as hermeneutics, and the second one is the political economy which shaped the two newspapers in their current characteristics. Any text or event is open for interpretation, and an interpretation depends on the interpreter’s worldview and attitudes. This factor has made *Kompas*’s and *Republika*’s difference in reporting. The political economy, or specifically, the power behind the press contributed to the difference in policies of the two newspapers’ editorship. In the wider context of Indonesia, the repressive New Order regime shaped the “infant” characteristics of Indonesian journalism. Transition from authoritarian regime to a democratic one is also reflected in the press life. The Indonesian press now should reconsider its role along with the democratic reform. Previously
repressed to be the mouthpiece of the government, today the Indonesian press becomes a
critical watchdog which is crucial in shaping the new Indonesia. The changing role of the
Indonesian press now has its momentum, but it depends on the press workers to
determine the press role for the future.

Approved: ________________________________

Director of Southeast Asian Studies
To
my parents

(Only when we want, the world can be changed – thank you for teaching me this lesson)
Acknowledgments

This thesis has been a work of several months after completing course work at the Southeast Asian Studies, Center for International Studies, Ohio University. This was mostly inspired by my professional experience when I worked as a journalist covering Indonesia. A close interaction with day-to-day life in Jakarta has forced me – at least – to write a scholarly writing which will become – I hope – a milestone for my scholarly pursuit. Thus, this work is a documentation of what I experienced in the past and what I am hoping to experience in the future.

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Athens, Ohio, January 29, 2002

Buni Yani
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The New Order and the Press

The Indonesian press has reflected the vast cultural and ethnic differences that make up Indonesia since the fall of President Soeharto from power in 1998. Under Soeharto’s authoritarian New Order regime there was no freedom of the press, as all press reports were required to be in line with the government’s views and programs. In 1994 Soeharto banned three publications, including *Tempo* magazine, *Editor* magazine and *Detik* tabloid, for their critical reports. Previously, in the 1970s and 1980s, there had been a number of similar bans. Different views voiced by the press were considered to be a “danger” that could destabilize the state and topple the government. The regime argued that stability was a must for a country like Indonesia that was still developing. Development in the economy was prioritized while democracy was repressed.

There was only one government-sponsored journalists’ organization, namely Indonesian Journalists Association, or Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI). But the 1994 ban on *Tempo, Editor* and *Detik* raised resistance among journalists who founded Independent Journalists Alliance, or Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI). AJI became the target of the New Order’s hostility. Journalists who dared to join AJI were not allowed to work in the media. And if a publisher employed AJI journalists, their publication licenses (known as SIUPP) might be withdrawn.
The New Order threatened the press in many ways, both directly or indirectly. In
day to day work, journalists were threatened by frequent phone calls from government
offices such as the Ministry of Information (that was authorized to issue publication
licenses) and the military or Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI). The calls
told journalists not to print stories that were considered “dangerous,” or to print certain
stories that were “good” for the government. The government treated the media as its PR
arm.

The regime’s fall in 1998 changed press life drastically. Previously suffering from
major repression, now the press became liberal. This radical change was difficult to
accomplish immediately. The journalists needed time to adapt from the state of
repression to the state of freedom. Professional human resources in journalism were
short. Press freedom can be likened to a two-edged sword: one side brought a positive
impact, while another brought a negative impact. Press freedom allowed a nationwide
discourse on democracy, while at the same time the press has been used by certain groups
for sectarian interests.

**Purpose**

This paper will examine how the sectarian conflict that broke out in Maluku on
January 19, 1999 was treated in the two most important Indonesian language newspapers.
In less than two months, the conflict which was local in origin became national. One
question raised by the paper is what was the role of the newly free press in the spread of
the conflict.


Kompas and Republika

This research focuses on how two prominent national newspapers, Kompas and Republika, reported, and to some extent, assessed, the conflict. These media are read nationally and it can be said that they become the “truth setters” for their readers. As will be shown in the study, the two newspapers reported the conflict differently.

Kompas (Compass) was established in 1965 by a number of Chinese and Javanese Catholic journalists in an attempt to voice Catholic political interests (Hill 1994:83). The year 1965 was the year of the Indonesian Communist Party’s (PKI) abortive coup. Kompas was “successful” in surviving the fall of President Soekarno in 1966 and it supported the emergence of the New Order regime. At that time, right-wing Catholics played important roles behind the scene as intellectuals, development planners and ideologues grouped in the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a think tank that was influential during the Soeharto regime. Among Kompas’s prominent editors and founders were Jakob Oetama and P.K. Ojong, both of whom were Chinese Catholics. P.K. Ojong died in 1980 which gone Jakob Oetama control of the management of the newspaper. As Hill observes,

Even Muslim journalists and editors at a 1991 seminar on the Islamic press, sponsored by the pro-government Association of Indonesian Islamic Intellectuals (ICMI) and held at the Department of Religion, acknowledged that Kompas covered Islamic activities more professionally and in more depth than rival papers like Pelita which had an explicit Islamic “mission” (Hill 1994:124-25).

Kompas started its publication with a daily circulation of 5,000 (Hill 1994:84; Sen and Hill 2000:57) in 1965. In 1995 it was the largest quality newspaper in Southeast Asia
with around half a million in daily circulation. *Kompas* was known in media circles in Jakarta for “playing it safe” by avoiding criticism or direct confrontation with New Order leaders. Its reports and editorials were said to reflect Jakob Oetama’s Javanese style. Philosopher Franz Magnis-Suseno once said that he did not read *Kompas* editorials because they were difficult to understand.\(^1\) Indonesianist Ben Anderson of Cornell University called *Kompas* the New Order newspaper par excellence (Hill 1994:84, Sen and Hill 2000:57). *Kompas*’s “safe” reports succeeded in avoiding attracting attention from the draconian Ministry of Information, which had the authority to ban any publications that dared to challenge the government.

*Kompas* targeted middle and upper class educated readers. Besides news and analysis, its articles also include science and technology, art and culture, lifestyle, fashion, advice, and other features, which were carefully edited before coming to print. Its opinion columns on page four were of the highest standard featuring prominent intellectuals and columnists.

*Kompas* prioritized business rather than politics. *Kompas*’s “business-orientation” led to the formation of the Kompas-Gramedia group, a holding company that managed around 38 subsidiaries in the 1990s (Hill 1994:84). Kompas-Gramedia group subsidiaries ranged from national to local publications across the country. According to AJI annual report (1998), after the collapse of the Indonesian press due to the economic crisis of 1997 the Kompas-Gramedia group still had 28 subsidiaries. They included *Kompas* daily, *The Jakarta Post* (English daily jointly published with *Suara Karya*, *Tempo*, and *Sinar*

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\(^1\) Franz Magnis-Soeseno told this story in the class at Driyarkara College of Philosophy I attended.
Harapan), Nova tabloid, Citra (Image) tabloid, Bola (Ball) tabloid, Tablo tabloid (the reincarnation of Warta Pramuka [Pramuka News] tabloid), Jakarta-Jakarta magazine, Tiara magazine, Hai (Hi) magazine, Bobo magazine, Intisari (Digest) magazine, Angkasa (Sky) magazine, Foto Media (Photo Media) magazine, Info Komputer (Computer Info) magazine, Kawanku (My Friend) magazine, Banda Aceh-based Serambi Indonesia (Veranda of Indonesia) daily, Palembang-based Sriwijaya Post, Yogyakarta-based Bernas daily, Surabaya-based Surya (Sun), Bogor-based Mandala (Circle) daily, Dili-based Suara Timor Timur (Voice of East Timor) daily, Kontan (Cash) tabloid, Hopla tabloid, Kupang-based Pos Kupang (Kupang Post) daily, Ambon-based Pos Maluku (Maluku Post) daily, Jayapura-based Tifa Irian (Irian/Papua Drum) daily, Audio Visual magazine, Banjarmasin-based Banjarmasin Post daily. Besides the media group, Kompas-Gramedia also owns a printing company, radio station, travel agency, hotels, heavy equipment, supermarkets, insurance, leasing, banking and advertising companies (Hill 1994:84). It has been reported that Kompas-Gramedia will own a TV station in the near future.

Subakti and Katoppo (in Hill 1994:85) recorded that Kompas earned the largest portion of the nation’s print advertising revenues. It grabbed 26.8 percent (Rp50,258 million) of the total advertisement in 1989, and this figure was expected to increase to 32.2 percent in 1993.

When Kompas was established in 1965, the Catholic middle class represented only around nine percent of the population of Indonesia. The success of Catholic

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2 Indonesian version of tabloid is different from those known in the Western press. The Indonesian tabloid only refers to the size of the paper. Thus the tabloid could be in the form of an entertainment tabloid, a political tabloid or an economic tabloid.
intellectuals and political figures in the New Order inspired fear in some Muslims, especially Muslim radicals who feared “Christianization.” They claimed that Kompas stood for “Komando Pastor” (the pastors’ commandoes).

Republika was established in 1993 by the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI). Republika aimed at voicing Muslim interests due to a perception that Muslims were marginalized in political and economic fields during the Soeharto regime. The establishment of Republika marked the emergence of political Islam under ICMI which was established in 1991 as a “vehicle” for modern and liberal Muslim intellectuals to come to power. Kompas has recruited a growing number of Muslim journalists who have reported Muslim perspectives. Republika, on the other hand, did not recruit any non-Muslim journalists. Even administrative and other managerial positions are all filled by Muslims. With this background, unlike Kompas, Republika has become a Muslim newspaper.

The strategy of Muslim intellectuals at that time was to elect Minister of Research and Technology, Baharudin Jusuf Habibie, the closest aide of President Soeharto, to be the ICMI chairman. Soeharto approved the establishment of ICMI, and when Republika’s shares were sold to the public in 1993, Soeharto advised all Muslims to buy the new newspaper’s shares. One person could buy only one share. Fifty one percent of the company’s shares are owned by ICMI, and 20 percent by the employees (Hill 1994:127). Republika was the first Indonesian newspaper to go public by floating the final 29 percent shares to the public.

In 1998 when Soeharto was appointed President for the sixth consecutive term, Habibie was appointed Vice President. Soeharto’s cabinet included several ICMI
members. The Muslims felt more represented. Some called this era the “honeymoon” between the New Order and political Islam. Republika became a semi-government voice and some even said that it became the mouthpiece of Golkar (Functional Group) – the party that endorsed Soeharto as president six times – although Golkar had its own newspaper, Suara Karya (Voice of Work).

When established in 1993, there were a number of prominent journalists on the editorial board of Republika, including Parni Hadi (former senior Antara news agency correspondent in Germany), Nasir Tamara (formerly with Tempo, Sinar Harapan, Warta Ekonomi), S. Sinansari Ecip (Tempo correspondent and a lecturer at Hasanuddin University in Ujung Pandang), and a number of members of ICMI such as Zaim Uchrowi.³

Like Kompas, Republika targeted middle and upper class educated Muslim readers. By August 1993, the paper’s circulation hit 125,000 copies. Muslims welcomed the publication of Republika, given it was the first professionally managed Muslim newspaper. The layout was neat; it used the standard Indonesian language spoken by educated people.

According to the AJI annual report (1998) there are six companies in the Republika group. They are Republika daily newspaper, Ummat (Muslim Community) magazine, Adil (Justice) tabloid, PT Sumber Daya Multi Media (a compact disc company), and PT Publika Hikmah Pratama (a book publisher). Another publication, Tekad (Strong Will), hit newsstand in 1998, but did not survive the economic crisis. Ummat stopped publication in 1998 for similar reasons.

³ Zaim Uchrowi became editor replacing Parni Hadi in November 2000. This marked the regeneration of the paper’s editors with younger journalists.
*Republika* became the voice of the liberal and modern Muslim intellectuals demanding wider participation in state affairs. The most vocal critic of Soeharto, Amien Rais, got wide coverage at *Republika*. Amien Rais, a professor of political science at the prestigious Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta, wrote columns and raised the issue of presidential succession during 1992-97 period, criticizing the long authoritarian rule of Soeharto.

**Research Questions**

This research will study the two newspapers’ reports from the beginning of the conflict in Maluku on January 19, 1999, when the conflict was local in nature, to March 12, 1999, when it became nationalized. The prime sources are the two newspapers’ reports.

There are a number of questions this research is trying to answer; they are:

1. Do *Kompas* and *Republika* reports count the victims of the conflict in the same way; if not, which paper counts more, and why?

2. Do the two papers assess conditions in the conflict area similarly or differently? Included in this point is whether the content of the two papers’ reports are the same.

3. Do the two papers give emphasis to some issues while at the same time neglecting other issues, and which issues are emphasized and which ones are neglected?

4. Do the two papers print the reports on the conflict every day, or, do they regard some of the events and incidents in the conflict as no longer important and newsworthy?
5. Do *Kompas* and *Republika* apply the same journalistic standard in reporting the Maluku conflict? This question focuses on seeing whether one of the two papers puts some of the facts of the conflict in the lead because they are regarded as important and newsworthy, or, it puts them at the middle or at the end of the report in order to suggest that these facts are not important.

Berger and Luckmann argue that “reality is socially constructed” (1967:1). The truth of reality depends on who interprets it. One person may interpret the same event differently from another person. As Berger and Luckmann argue,

> Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world. … The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these (Berger and Luckmann 1967:19-20).

Thus, *Kompas* and *Republika* are likely to report the emerging conflict in different ways through the lens of Muslim or Catholic perspectives. The embedded presumptions of *Kompas’s* and *Republika’s* reports are assumed to have been influenced by their religious affiliations.
CHAPTER 2
Analysis of Kompas and Republika Coverage
of January 19 – March 12, 1999

The conflict began on the Idul Fitri national holiday on January 19-20, 1999. Only on January 21, 1999 were the national newspapers able to report the conflict. Thus, there was a one day interval in reporting.

First Reports of the Outbreak of Violence: January 21, 1999

In its January 21, 1999 edition, Kompas reported the outbreak of the conflict in a headline entitled Ambon Town Hit by Riot between Residents (Kota Ambon Diguncang Keributan Antarwarga) (edu, fr). Kompas said that 11 people had been killed, including a police officer, while 23 others were injured. The report said that rioters burned 45 houses, five shops and 75 kiosks, and damaged 161 cars, 25 motorbikes, and 100 becak (pedicab). Of the 11 victims, Kompas identified four as Matheos Karels, Yapi Maspeitella, Otniel Yauwan, and Tahir Taslim. According to Kompas, the riot broke out when a public transportation driver, Yopie Saiya of Batumerah, and a hoodlum, Ferry Mual of Karangpanjang Bawah, fought. Indonesian readers would know from the four victims’ names that the first three were Christians, while the last one was a Muslim. According to Kompas, Yopie and his two friends chased a hoodlum with parangs to

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4 Kompas used only initials for straight news reports, but gave byline credits at the end of feature articles. In Indonesian journalism, byline news report is not common. Indonesian language newspapers and magazines use initials or full names (at the end of the report).
Batumerah. Yopie did not find the hoodlum but attacked a resident known as Mohamad Bugis. Bugis escaped and returned for his *parang* and chased Yopie and his friends. Batumerah residents who were celebrating the Idul Fitri holiday followed Mohamad Bugis chasing Yopie and his friends to the kampong Mardika. Failing to catch the three men, people from Batumerah burned two houses and a workshop. Quoting a police source, *Kompas* said that Ferry Mual was known as a troublemaker who frequently started fights in the surrounding area. He had been arrested several times but was released because his father was a retired army officer. To calm down the riot, 400 police officers were deployed and 400 Kostrad (Army Strategic Reserve Command) personnel sent to Ambon. These officers were in addition to the number of army, navy, and air force personnel based in Ambon.

On the same day *Republika*, quoting a police source, said that 10 people had been killed in the riot. The headline read *At Least 10 Dead in Ambon Riot (Sedikitnya 10 Tewas dalam Kerusuhan di Ambon)* (no journalist’s name, the report was from *Antara* news agency). Of the 10 victims, *Republika* identified four as Matheos Karels, Yapi Maspeitella, Otniel Yauwan, and Tahir Taslim, which it put at the end of the article. More than 100 people were reported injured, while four worshipping places (no details whether they were mosques or churches), 30 houses, 15 cars, 25 motorbikes, 75 shops, and five kiosks were burned. *Republika* described Ambon as “gripped by fear” (*mencekam*) which paralyzed the town and surrounding area. People found it difficult to find food as shops and kiosks were closed. A military company from Central Maluku, a

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5 The *Kompas* report is not clear in explaining who was chased by Yopie and his friends. It said Yopie and Ferry chased a hoodlum, whereas it said formerly that Yopie and Ferry fought.

6 In Indonesian, it is *kompi*. 
brigade of Kostrad from Ujungpandang (now Makassar), one battalion of anti riot police, and the mobile brigade from Bali were deployed to Ambon. Republika said that the riot which had spread to “the entire town of Ambon and led to sectarian" conflict” had been caused by “a misunderstanding between a Batumerah resident and a public transportation driver.” It cited a statement by a Protestant bishop asserting that “no single church had been burned.”

The difference between the reports in Kompas and Republika is significant. Readers would know from the Kompas and Republika reports that three Christians and one Muslim had been killed. Kompas put this information in the middle section of its article, while Republika put it at the end of its article. It can be argued that Kompas tried to make this information “important” for the readers, while Republika tried to make it “less important.” Also, Republika quoted a Protestant bishop who said “no single church had been burned.” Kompas implied that Christians were the victims, while Republika implied that Muslims were the victims, by noting that no church had been burned.

January 22, 1999

On January 22, 1999, Kompas printed two stories on the riot. The first was a headline entitled Curfew in Ambon (Jam Malam di Ambon) (edu, msh, fr, nar, boy, Antara) which said that a curfew had been imposed in Ambon and surrounding areas. It said that the conflict had spread to nearby islands, such as Seram and Sulabesi. Quoting a police source, Kompas reported 22 dead, 102 seriously injured, 35 with minor injuries, and three police officers seriously injured. Losses included the burning of 88 houses (19

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7 SARA (suku, agama, ras dan antargolongan = tribe, religion, race, intergroup).
others were destroyed), three churches, three mosques, 33 shops, 12 kiosks, two markets, 22 cars, 25 motorbikes, and 216 becaks (pedicabs). It said 3,950 refugees had sought protection in police headquarters and a navy base in Ambon. The police source said 16 military companies had been deployed. *Kompas* described Ambon as a “dead town, partitioned, and isolated.” It said heavy black smoke still could be seen, while in several places people had set up blockades and screened identity cards. “People did not dare to go out from their surroundings or their houses,” said *Kompas*. Only flights for military interests were available as regular flights were stopped. Quoting a police source, *Kompas* again said that the riot was instigated by a hoodlum from Batumerah Bawah (no detail whether he was Ferry Mual or a Muslim) who pressed Yopie Saiya, a public transportation driver, for some money. It also quoted the police chief in Jakarta who said that there was no relationship between the Ambon riot and the Ketapang riot that had occurred in November 1998. He denied that a number of youths had been sent from Jakarta to Ambon shortly before the riot erupted. The second headline was a feature article entitled *People’s Harmony Frame Spoiled* (*Bingkai Kerukunan Umat Itu Terusik*) by Edi Danu Puspito which discussed *pela gandong* culture.

In contrast to *Kompas*, *Republika* in its January 22, 1999 edition said that the condition in Ambon town had returned to “normal” in a headline entitled *Ambon Gradually Returns to Normal, Thousands of People Flee – 22 Dead, Tens of Buildings*

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8 On Sunday, November 22, 1988, a riot broke out in downtown Jakarta of Ketapang, a few hundred meters from the State Palace. The riot was instigated by a group of security guards of gambling places who “terrorized” the Ketapang residents (Ecip: 1999:1). Most of the security guards were Ambonese Christians who are sometimes labeled as “hoodlums.” The violence turned into a sectarian riot when a rumor spread that a mosque was damaged by the security guards. In a few hours, a mob destroyed public facilities and burned 10 churches, two schools, one hotel, 16 cars, three motorbikes, and tens of other buildings. A number of the security guards were killed in the riot.

9 *Pela gandong* is a culture of harmony in Ambon.
Burned (Ambon Berangsur Pulih, Ribuan Warga Mengungsi – 22 Tewas, Puluhan Bangunan Hangus) (bid, Antara).\(^{10}\) Quoting a police source, Republika updated the number of victims. It included 22 dead, 102 seriously injured, 35 with minor injuries, and three police officers injured. Losses included the burning of 88 houses (19 others were destroyed), two markets, two banks, 33 shops, 12 kiosks, 22 cars, 25 motorbikes, and 216 becaks. It reported that one thousand refugees fled to Ambon navy base and 2,000 to police headquarters and offices in Ambon. Republika said that the riot was ignited by a fight between Yopie Saiya, a resident of Batumerah Atas, and youths from Batumerah Bawah where the majority of residents were “Muslims.” It also reported the raising of an RMS\(^\text{11}\) flag. It said, “When Ambon did not totally return to normal, an RMS flag was hoisted in Gunung Nona and in Karang Panjang kampong. People hauled down and destroyed the separatist flag. Handouts demanding that Maluku separate from the Indonesian Republic and form South Maluku Republic were distributed.”

There are also significant differences in the January 22, 1999 reporting of Kompas and Republika. The first difference is that Kompas said Ambon was still tense, making the curfew policy the headline, while Republika said conditions had returned to normal. Republika’s report that conditions in Ambon had returned to normal makes sense in terms of showing the effectiveness of President Habibie’s administration amidst widespread discontent over his legitimacy in succeeding President Soeharto. Republika was published by PT Abdi Bangsa, a company linked with the Habibie-led Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI).

\(^{10}\) Republika also used initials in its reports. In feature articles it credited journalists with a byline at the end of the article.

\(^{11}\) RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan) is the South Maluku Republic separatist movement that was crushed in 1950 by the Indonesian government.
The second difference is that *Kompas* did not report the RMS flag incidents. This incident suggested that the conflict in Ambon was not ethnic or religious in nature, but derived from the (defeated) separatist movement in Maluku in 1950.

**January 23, 1999**

In its January 23, 1999 edition *Kompas* reported that conditions had returned to normal in Ambon. In the headline *Ambon Begins to Be Normal – ABRI Commander in Chief: Arrest and Bring the Provocateurs to Court (Ambon Mulai Tenang – Pangab: Tangkap dan Adili Provokatornya)* (edu, fr, msh, boy, rie, myr) it cited ABRI Commander in Chief General Wiranto’s order to arrest the riot “provocateurs.” It updated the number of victims to 37 dead, while 39 were seriously injured. Losses included the burning of 189 houses, 19 cars, 11 motorbikes, 200 *becaks*, 82 kiosks, three markets, 13 worshipping places (no details on how many churches and how many mosques), two buildings, a hostel, and a cinema. Refugees numbered 21,000 who went to a number of military installations and other facilities. Quoting *Reuters*, it said 40 expatriates had been evacuated from Ambon to Darwin, Australia. In its report, *Kompas* said, “In general, the relationship among religious groups was gradually recovering. Mosques and churches were temporarily guarded by respective followers accompanied by security apparatus. However, in several places Muslims and Christians guarded worshipping places together.” It continued, “In Daarun Na’im Mosque, Wayame village, Baguala district, for example, Friday prayer ran smoothly with tight security assistance from the Youth Group of the Maluku Protestant Church (GPM).” In Al-Fatah Mosque, the largest mosque in Ambon, *Kompas* estimated that the number of Muslims attending the Friday prayer was
half of 6,000 capacity. Not all people were involved in the riot, Kompas said, adding that in several places in downtown Ambon people helped one another “regardless of race and religion.” Kompas said that due to the closing of shops and other trading centers, people were having difficulty in finding food and other basic necessities. It said that President Habibie appealed to people not to be easily provoked. Kompas’s editorial reflected on a series of riots throughout the country. It asked, “after Ketapang, Kupang, Karawang, and Ambon, what place will follow!”

Republika on January 23, 1999 reported the update of victims and material losses, refugees who fled to several places, and the evacuation of 45 expatriates to Darwin, Australia. Under the headline Dead Number More than 40 – Tens of Thousand Refugees Suffer (Korban Tewas Lebih dari 40 Orang – Puluhan Ribu Pengungsi Menderita) (bid, wid, awh, dam, ris, esa), it said that 40 people had been killed while 39 were seriously injured. Facilities burned included 476 houses, 19 cars, 15 motorbikes, 200 becaks, 13 churches, and three mosques. Republika described conditions in Ambon as “gripped by fear” causing at least 20,612 refugees to go to a number of public facilities – including Al-Fatah Mosque. Republika also reported the assistance from the Youth Group of the Maluku Protestant Church (GPM) in guarding Muslims’ Friday prayer as a “comforting spectacle.” The order from General Wiranto, ABRI Commander in Chief, to arrest “provocateurs” was reported. Republika also quoted an unidentified source who said that “the riot in Ambon had long been prepared. They prepared themselves by making arrows and Molotov cocktails.” It continued, “Rioters… took advantage of the decreasing number of people who went home for Idul Fitri. When they were attacked, residents of Batumerah Bawah who are Muslim, were unprepared to defend themselves.”
In Jakarta, the chairman of the largest Muslim organization Nahdatul Ulama (NU) Abdurrahman Wahid said that the “provocateur” lived near his house in South Jakarta. Wahid claimed to have information from an NU informant in Ambon that “by Idul Fitri… around 160 provocateurs of the riot went home to Ambon.” Quoting another unidentified source from Southeast Maluku, Republika added that “before the riot many hoodlums from Ketapang, Jakarta, were sent home to Ambon.” In its editorial on the same day, Republika proposed that there was a “grand design” in the series of the riots across the country.

In the January 23, 1999 edition, Republika counted more victims and losses than Kompas. Both papers reported ABRI Commander in Chief General Wiranto’s statement on the existence of “provocateurs.” Both reported assistance from Youth Group of Maluku Protestant Church (GPM) to guard the Muslims’ Friday prayer. But by this date reporting in the two newspapers began to diverge. Kompas said that not all people were involved in the riot and reflected anxiously where the next riot would take place; Republika quoted a source on the possibility of the involvement of the Jakarta’s Ketapang hoodlums. Republika’s editorial suggested a “grand design” in these riots. This is the first time Republika used the term “Muslim” to describe the group that were the victims. It said, “When they were attacked, residents of Batumerah Bawah who are Muslim, were unprepared to defend themselves.”

12 In its January 22, 1999 report Republika also used the word “Muslims” but not as the victims.
January 24, 1999

On January 24, 1999, the Kompas headline read Pangdam\textsuperscript{13} VIII/Trikora: Shoot on the Spot (Pangdam VIII/Trikora: Tembak di Tempat) (edu, Antara). The article quoted the Military Regional Commander in Chief’s shoot-on-the-spot order if people failed to give up their weapons. It updated the number of the victims to 47 dead, while 48 others were injured. Losses included 261 houses burned, 20 cars, 11 motorbikes, 216 becaks, 82 kiosks, three markets, 13 worshipping places (no details on how many mosques and churches), two banks, one government-owned building, one hostel, and one movie theater. At least 20,619 people had fled to military headquarters, worshipping places, and other social facilities, said Kompas. Describing Ambon’s streets as “deserted because public transportations and becaks were not in operation,” Kompas said that the riot had spread to Sasana in North Maluku and West Seram District in Central Maluku. It reported that only military vehicles and a limited number of private cars and motorbikes could be seen on the street, while “activities in either government or private company offices were still paralyzed.” Security officers, said Kompas, distributed handouts jointly signed by religious leaders from Maluku Indonesian Ulemas Council (MUI), Maluku Protestant Church Synod (GPM), Catholic Amboina pastor, and Muslim leaders, appealing for an end to violence with an approval from Governor Saleh Latuconsina. The second Kompas report was entitled More Than 100 Foreigners Leave Ambon (Lebih 100 WNA Tinggalkan Ambon) (boy, ans), while the third was In Overcoming Ambon Tragedy ABRI

\textsuperscript{13} Pangdam stands for Panglima Daerah Militer, or Military Regional Commander-in-Chief.
Doesn’t Take Sides (Dalam Atasi Tragedi Ambon ABRI Tak Berpihak) (as, tra, boy, son, jan, dth, hrd, fr, Antara).

In the January 24, 1999 edition, Republika printed an article with the headline Dead in Ambon Number 47 (Korban Tewas di Ambon Terdata 47 Orang) (no journalist’s name, from Antara), which said that “the Ambon situation was gradually returning to normal” although “activities in government or private company offices were still paralyzed.” Republika said that up to that day 47 people had been killed, 48 injured, while at least 20,619 people had fled. Because shopping centers were closed, it said, people found it difficult to find food and other basic needs. The shoot-on-the-spot order, said Republika, “was obeyed” by the people. It reported that security officers distributed handouts containing a joint appeal signed by several religious leaders. Quoting Governor Saleh Latuconsina, Republika said that Ambon was short of nine basic foods. The riot had spread to Sasana in North Maluku and West Seram Barat in Central Maluku, said Republika. The second headline Republika printed was a feature article entitled Please Ensure Their Corpses Are Treated Like Muslims (Tolong Mayatnya Dirawat Layaknya Orang Islam) (esa). In this article Republika interviewed a 42-year old Muslim woman called Rukiyah. “Rukiyah (42) could not sleep well for the last three days. She imagined the flames of the fire that burned her house when she left it for a Muslim gathering (silaturrahmi) with her neighbors Tuesday night (1/19). In the house, which was made of wood, were her mother, Mrs. Yana (72); her older sister, Mrs. Suadah (45) with her two children; her younger brother, Mustafa (33); and her younger male cousin, Zais (18).” In this report Republika also interviewed Haji Amas, a Muslim whose native town was
Buton, South Sulawesi. In this report Republika failed to interview a Christian source for balanced reporting.

In their January 24, 1999 editions, both Kompas and Republika reported relatively similar information on the number of victims, shoot-on-the-spot order, the distribution of handouts signed by religious leaders, and the closing of offices and other public facilities. However, Republika’s second report provided an emotional account of the viewpoint of Muslim victims without balance from other perspectives.

**The Lull in Violence: January 25 -- January 31, 1999**

On January 25, 1999, Kompas printed the headline Ambon Calm – 50 Provocateurs Arrested, Two Become Suspects (Ambon Kembali Aman – 50 Provokator Ditahan, Dua Jadi Tersangka) (edu, boy, son, fr, Antara) which said “security and order in Ambon Town and surrounding areas Sunday (1/24) was under control.” It said that, “People had returned to daily activities, such as worship in the church and buying basic commodities and kerosene in the market. Religious services in many churches ran peacefully.” Kompas updated the number of victims to 52 people dead. Meanwhile, quoting a Muslim source, Haji Muhammad Nur Wenno, Kompas said that the number of refugees had increased to more than 50,000 people who were housed in various places in Ambon. It reported that “Protestant and Catholic religious leaders urged religious followers to uphold unity and brotherhood and to not be easily provoked with misleading rumors….” The second report was entitled Shoot-on-the-Spot Order to Face Accelerating Violence (Perintah Tembak di Tempat untuk Hadapi Akselerasi Kekerasan) (son, boy), while the third one was entitled Muslim Organization Forum: Try Theo Sjafei (Forum
Organisasi Islam: Adili Theo Sjafei) (iie). *Kompas* said that Forum Organisasi Islam demanded that retired Major General Theo Sjafei should be tried for a lecture in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), in which was recorded on a cassette and distributed to the public.\(^{14}\)

In the January 26, 1999 edition, *Kompas* again reported that conditions in Ambon had returned to normal, regular flights from and to Pattimura Airport were reopened, while “the main activity in Ambon was to clear the remnants of motor vehicles and *becaks* which were shattered during the riot.” It again interviewed Haji Muhammad Nur Wenno who said that Muslims do not want unrest and violence. The second report was entitled *ABRI Nauseated by Violence (ABRI Muak dengan Tindak Kekerasan)* (ama), while the third one was *President B.J. Habibie: There Should Be No Sectarian Cases (Seyogianya Tidak Ada Kasus SARA)* (journalist: osd).

On January 27, 1999, quoting a number of youth leaders, *Kompas* said that President Habibie disagreed with the idea of “mysterious shooting” (*penembakan misterius*) for the “provocateurs,” adding that any violation of law “in this *reformasi* era should be processed legally.”\(^{15}\) *Kompas* said that Nahdatul Ulama Chairman Abdurrahman Wahid would be asked for further information regarding his statement that the “provocateurs” of the Ambon riot lived near his house in Ciganjur, South Jakarta. Quoting a police source in Ambon, *Kompas* said that of 50 people investigated in the riot, 37 had been named suspects. The number of victims had increased to 55 dead, and losses

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\(^{14}\) Theo Sjafei’s lecture was regarded by Muslims as an insult against Islam. They claimed that he had provoked a fight between Muslims and Christians in the province. However, Theo was never brought to court for this accusation.

\(^{15}\) This political statement was not released by President Habibie directly. Habibie told the youth leaders about the statement, and the youth leaders told the press after they met Habibie at the State Palace.
included the burning of 576 houses, 21 worshipping places, 102 kiosks, 55 shops, 20 cars, 11 motorbikes, 216 becaks, a government-owned building, an elementary school building, a cinema, and three markets.

On January 28, 1999, Kompas reported that 90 suspected “provocateurs” had been arrested. It updated the number of victims to 60 dead, and reported an exodus of 2,500 migrant workers who returned to their native hometowns in South Sulawesi. Kompas said that central leadership of the second largest Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, had released a statement consisting of four points which said that “…Muslims wherever they are, are (asked) to raise aid for Muslims in Maluku.” The second report said that the police met Abdurrhaman Wahid for further information on his statement about provocateurs. The third report was a feature article which regretted that the provocateurs were “legally untouched” (tidak tersentuh hukum). Kompas said that, “Komnas HAM (National Commission on Human Rights) which investigated in various riot locations concluded the existence of the provocateurs.” It continued, “In various riots which occurred there was a similar pattern between one incident and other incidents.”

On January 30, 1999, Kompas in a feature article said that security officers found a number of guns and some ammunitions in two residential houses in Kaitetu Village (Ambon island), Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency. Quoting a military source, Kompas said that “the guns and ammunition were allegedly owned by a certain group with a certain purpose.”

On January 31, 1999, Kompas reported the arrival of Komnas HAM to investigate the riot. The second report was a feature article on how to recover the harmonious
character of Ambon. The third report was also a feature article on *pela gandong* harmony culture.

*Republika* did not print any single report on the Ambon riot for six days (1/25/99 – 1/30/99). Only on January 31, 1999 did it print a feature article on the break up of *pela gandong* harmony culture.

There are several significant changes between January 25 to January 31. The first one is *Kompas* reported the Ambon conflict almost every day, while *Republika* did not print any report during this period. According to *Kompas*’s reports (Jan. 25-26), conditions in Ambon were returning to normal. *Republika* possibly regarded this progress as not “newsworthy.”

The second one is *Kompas*’s quote on Muhammadiyah’s statement that read “Muslims wherever they are, are (asked) to raise aid for Muslims in Maluku” (*umat Islam di mana pun untuk menghimpun bantuan bagi umat Islam di Maluku*). There are two opposing interpretations for this quote. The first one is *Kompas* tried to draw people’s attention to help people in need in Ambon. However, the word “aid” (*bantuan*) is not specific and can be interpreted as “help in the form of weapons” (because at that time a call for jihad had also been raised by Muslim radicals).

The third one is significant because this is the first time *Kompas* said that conflict in Ambon seems to be engineered as “from various riots which occurred there was a similar pattern between one incident and other incidents” (Jan. 28). This may be paralleled with *Republika*’s “grand design” which suggests a “conspiracy theory.”

The fourth one is that this is the first time *Kompas* revealed the finding of guns and ammunition in the warring areas (Jan 30). *Kompas* was very careful in quoting a
military source that they were “allegedly owned by certain groups with certain purpose” (emphases added). *Kompas* “plays it safe” and avoids confronting the government. It would be revealed later that a number of automatic guns such as AK-47 were only owned by the military.

**Investigators from the Human Rights Commission: February 3, 1999**

On February 3, 1999, the *Kompas* headline read *Ambon Panics – Komnas HAM Entourage Blocked (Ambon Panik – Rombongan Komnas HAM Dihadang)* (bdm, edu, boy). It said that the Komnas HAM (National Commission on Human Rights) members almost became victims following a fight between two youths in Mardika bus terminal. *Kompas* said, “The car carrying Albert Hasibuan (a Komnas HAM member) was waylaid by a crowd. The people asked Komnas to be just. Hasibuan got out of the car and people continued to point their fingers (to Hasibuan)." But someone ordered the people to allow the Komnas entourage to pass. The car was thumped.” *Kompas* also reported 225,000 people from South Sulawesi lived in Maluku, 30,000 of whom lived in Ambon. A second report said that the police were still investigating.

*Republika’s* headline on February 3, 1999 read *Ambon Riot Almost Repeats – Komnas HAM Entourage Blocked by Crowd (Kerusuhan Ambon Nyaris Terulang – Rombongan Komnas HAM Dihadang Massa)* (mag, ris, dam). *Republika* said that, “Albert Hasibuan from Komnas HAM was threatened with a spear.” It continued, “The incident took place two hours before the arrival of six Reform Cabinet Ministers. They

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16 The people pointing their fingers to Albert Hasibuan are assumed to demand their protests be paid attention.
included the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of Social Affairs, the Minister of Religion, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Forestry and Plantation led by Coordinating Minister for People’s Welfare and Poverty Eradication.” Republika quoted a Maluku police source that 95 people had been killed, 85 people suffered serious injuries, and 137 people had minor injuries. It added that 135 people had been investigated by the police, and 57 people were made suspects. According to Republika, Governor Latuconsina said that losses included 2,017 houses totally damaged, 329 houses with major damage, 68 houses with minor damage, 12 mosques and 19 churches burned, three markets, 315 kiosks and shops, a cinema, and two banks damaged.

There are also some significant differences in the February 3, 1999 reports in Kompas and Republika. Both newspapers reported the blockade of Komnas HAM members by unidentified persons. Albert Hasibuan, one of the Komnas HAM members in the entourage, according to Kompas and Republika, was threatened by unidentified persons. Neither paper pointed out that Hasibuan is a Christian, and the place where his car was waylaid was close to a Muslim village in Mardika market. But readers would know that Albert Hasibuan was a Christian and guess that the protesters against him were Muslim. Both papers also failed to mention that the other Komnas HAM members were Muslim. Republika noted that “the incident took place two hours before the arrival of six Reform Cabinet Ministers.” This can be interpreted as Republika’s attempt to show how violence prone Ambon town was at that time. Even the arrival of six cabinet ministers from Jakarta could not be well prepared by security officers. Republika’s account that more churches than mosques burned (12 mosques and 19 churches) is significant, because it suggested that Republika is an objective newspaper in reporting. The Kompas
report that 225,000 South Sulawesi people lived in Maluku, 30,000 of whom lived in Ambon town could be seen to confirm the Christian view of the “Islamization” of Ambon, as almost all South Sulawesi people are Muslim.

**Violence Breaks Out Again: February 4, 1999**

On February 4, 1999, the *Kompas* headline read *Kairatu in Seram Island Hit by Riot – 12 Houses Burned (Kairatu di Pulau Seram Rusuh – 12 Rumah Dibakar)* (bdm, edu, boy). In the lead, *Kompas* said that when Ambon town returned to normal, a riot broke out in Kairatu District, Seram Island. The riot was instigated by a brawl between two youths. “… suddenly a house caught on fire, which spread to other houses in front of Kairatu market.” In Bone, South Sulawesi, *Kompas* reported the arrest of a “rioter” (*pelaku kerusuhan*) whose name was Ma (19).¹⁷ According to *Kompas*, Ma said that he was in Ambon from May 29, 1998 to January 29, 1999 to seek a job. Failing to find a job, Ma became a broker (*calo*), whose work was “to demand money by force from every driver, which was passed on to a ‘boss’” (*mengompas setiap sopir, yang kemudian hasilnya disetor kepada seorang ‘bos’*). *Kompas* said, “An incident occurred after Ma asked for money from a driver whose name was Yi. Yi refused to give the money and hit (Ma), then (he) called his friends to chase and gang up on Ma.” Ma left Ambon after that.

*Republika* on the same day printed a report entitled *Ambon Riot Spread to Seram Island, Market Complex Burned (Kerusuhan Ambon Menular ke Pulau Seram, Kompleks Pasar Terbakar)* (ban, vie, Antara). This report was quite different from the usual format of straight news, because the content of the report did not reflect its title. Instead of

¹⁷ To hide a person’s identity, the Indonesian press shortens his/her name or uses initial.
reporting the riot in Seram Island, *Republika* quoted a statement by the Minister of Religious Affairs who said that to recover condition in Ambon, people’s trust is needed. *Republika* also quoted a Maluku community leader, Drs. Freddy Latumahina, who said that “there is a group which deliberately enflames people and certain ethnic groups to fight each other and separates them from each other.” The modus operandi of provocation, said Freddy, “is the burning of a housing complex, inhabited by people from Bugis and Buton. This becomes inter-religious conflict.”

In this February 4, 1999 edition, both *Kompas* and *Republika* begin to take the side of a religious group. *Kompas* reported the origin of Ma, the suspected rioter in Ambon. Although *Kompas* did not mention the full name of Ma, it was clear that he was a Muslim because he came from Bone, South Sulawesi. *Kompas* also pointed out that Ma was a hoodlum whose job was to ask for money by force. *Republika*, on the other hand, quoted a Christian source, Drs. Freddy Latumahina, who said that Bugis and Buton people were targeted by provocateurs. In this way, *Republika* suggested that it was Muslims who were the targets and the victims of the conflict, but it pointed the finger at provocateurs rather Christians.

**Presidential Team Visits Ambon, More Violence: February 16, 1999**

On February 16, 1999, the *Kompas* headline read *President Sends Special Team to Maluku (Presiden Tugaskan Tim Khusus ke Maluku)* (dth, edu, ody, ely, mba). *Kompas* reported that President Habibie had responded to the spread of the conflict to other islands in the province by sending a special team to investigate (on February 15, 1999 *Kompas* reported that the conflict spread to Haruku Island, Central Maluku). The team
consisted of a number of people from Maluku, including Major General (Ret.) Jos Muskitta, Des Alwi and K. Kaplale, whose task was to “seek a solution” for the Maluku conflict. *Kompas* reported 20 people dead, 37 seriously injured, 127 houses and one church damaged. The riot also spread to Saparua Island where around 20 houses were burned. *Kompas* quoted the Maluku Muslims Alliance (Almuluk), which asked security officers to improve their performance in order that various problems in Maluku could be anticipated. Almuluk’s statement was released in a press conference at the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta.

On February 16, 1999 the *Republika* headline read *Ambon Gripped by Fear, Looting and Burning Return* (*Ambon Mencekam, Penjarahan dan Pembakaran Berulang*) (afa, *Antara*). *Republika* said that riot in Haruku, which claimed tens of people, disturbed Ambon. *Republika* quoted a Muslim source, Thamrin Ely, who reported the burning and looting of Muslims’ belongings by an “unidentified group” in Ambon. Thamrin Ely added that many Muslim leaders were terrorized and threatened by unidentified persons. He suggested that tension in Ambon was instigated by a news report by a private television station on the Haruku Island clash. The station, said Thamrin, reported that the Muslim kampong of Pelauw attacked the Christian kampong of Kariu on Haruku Island. According to Thamrin, the report was mistaken, it was Muslims who were attacked by Christians. Thamrin said that the 13 people who died in the Haruku Island clash were shot in the back when they tried to seek security and protection. To prove his claim, Thamrin said that even the house of the Chairman of Al-Fatah Mosque Foundation, H. Abdullah Soulissa in Ambon, was burned by an unidentified group, “although the religious leader’s house was only 100 meters from (the house of) Maluku Police Chief
Colonel Karyono.” Republika also reported President Habibie’s sending a “special team” to Maluku. At the end of the report, Republika quoted Almuluk’s statement which said that ABRI should be alert to the revival of RMS. “During the riot in Ambon, RMS flags were hoisted in several places,” it said.

There are significant differences in Kompas’s and Republika’s reports on February 16, 1999. Firstly, Kompas focused on what was happening in Haruku island but made no reference to the religion of victims or attackers. It reported the response of President Habibie in Jakarta, but ignored the impact of the Haruku clash in Ambon. On the other hand, Republika focused its report on the impact of the Haruku clash in Ambon and the burning and the looting of Muslims’ belongings. Republika’s report was one-sided because it failed to quote the Christian side. The report clearly showed Republika’s defense of Muslim interest by the use of Muslim sources and the length of the quotation from Muslim source. Secondly, Kompas quoted the Almuluk’s statement that ABRI should improve its performance in handling the Maluku conflict, but failed to quote the Almuluk’s suspicion of the involvement of the RMS in the conflict. Kompas was consistent in that it did not believe in the presence of the RMS, and thus ignored Almuluk’s suspicion. Republika took the view that there was a “grand design” behind the conflict, and it was not just a religious conflict.

Another Lull: February 17-February 23, 1999

Republika did not print any reports on the conflict from February 17, 1999 to February 23, 1999.
On February 19, 1999 Kompas printed a report entitled *Ambon Rehabilitation Begins – Bomb Blasts in Batumerah* (Rehabilitasi Ambon Dimulai – Bom Meledak di Batumerah) (edu, dth, bb). It said that the first phase of rebuilding four worshipping places and a number of houses (67 units in Hunit Village, 182 units in Nania, 38 in Negerilima) had begun. This project was executed by ABRI and residents. Ambon’s return to normalcy for the last two weeks was however spoiled by five bomb blasts in Batumerah and Karangpanjang, although people did not panic, Kompas said.

On February 22, 1999 the Kompas headline read *Reconciliation Agenda in Maluku – Rebuilding People’s Solidarity* (Agenda Rekonsiliasi di Maluku – Membangun Kembali Solidaritas Masyarakat) (dth). The lead read, “Not 24 hours after Team Six was set up Saturday (2/13) to arrange a reconciliation agenda for the Ambon riot, there was a new outbreak of violence. The number of riot victims in Haruku Island could be said to be small as (only) 20 people died, 37 were seriously injured, around 150 houses burned, and a worshipping place had been burned.” In this article, Kompas reported that of the 2,088,000 people in Maluku province, 59.01 percent are Muslims, 35.29 percent Protestant, 5.9 percent Catholic, and the rest other religions. Of around 311,000 people in Ambon, 51.92 percent are Protestants, 42.38 percent Muslim, and 5.55 percent Catholic.

There is a significant difference between Kompas and Republika during this period. Kompas still regarded conditions in Ambon as “important” and “newsworthy.” On the other hand, Republika did not print any reports.

Kompas’s report on February 22, 1999 which said that the majority of Maluku population was Muslim (59.01 percent), pointed out that Muslims form a majority in the
province. One interpretation of this data is that “Islamization” was taking place in Maluku as feared by many Christians.

**Bomb Blasts: February 24, 1999**

On February 24, 1999 the *Kompas* headline read *Bomb Blasts, Ambon Tense Again (Bom Menggelegar, Ambon Tegang Lagi)* (edu). It said that the bombings again stirred up “inter-group suspicion” about who was responsible. “Tension spread to the entire town, especially the adjacent villages Batumerah and Mardika.”

In its February 24, 1999 edition, the *Republika* headline read *Ambon Restless Again, 9 Residents Dead (Ambon Kembali Rusuh, 9 Warga Tewas)* (Antara, esa). It said that the riot followed the burning of 15 houses at Kampung Batu Merah in Ambon and a “mosque” at Iha in Central Maluku. *Republika* said that “seven people died in Ambon town, four people were slaughtered at Kampung Batu Merah when their houses were burned.”

There is a significant difference in *Kompas* and *Republika* reporting on this date. *Kompas* referred to “intergroup suspicion” while *Republika* said that a “mosque” was burned in the riot. *Republika* also used the word “slaughtered” although it did not specify who were slaughtered, Muslims or Christians. *Kompas* used “moderate” words to avoid adding fuel to conflict, while *Republika* used “strong” words that could potentially raise people’s emotion.
February 26, 1999

On February 26, 1999 Kompas discussed the pros and cons of imposing a civil emergency (darurat sipil) status on the warring province. In a report entitled Civil Emergency Pros and Cons in Ambon (Pro Kontra Darurat Sipil di ambon) by Budiman Tanuredjo, Kompas said that this “needs considering from various sides” because the emergency would limit people’s freedom and its political consequence would be regarded “less favorable” (kurang menguntungkan). But, it said, “if the conflict continues and claims victims, politically the condition is also unfavorable. …If that happens, conditions are getting worse.” Kompas also said that “the conflicting factions wore headbands to show their identities.” It added that Governor Latuconsina had suggested that stern action should be taken to handle the conflict but this was not appreciated by a “certain group.” Kompas said that ABRI had been accused of taking sides and protecting one of the warring factions, so that the position of security was “not easy” (tidak mudah). Along with this report, Kompas printed another report examining the impact of the civil emergency status for the people.

On February 25, 1999 the Republika headline read Nine Basic Foods Short – Ambon Still Tense (Sembako Langka – Ambon Masih Mencekam) (one, esa, afa). It said that Ambon town was short of basic foods, and if they were available, “the selling price soared.” It quoted Mohammad Kasuba from Partai Keadilan (PK, Justice Party)\(^\text{18}\) task force. Kasuba said that four students from IAIN (State Islamic Institute) had been “abducted and slaughtered cruelly.” Republika printed another report entitled Ambon Still Crying (Ambon yang Masih Manangise) (no journalist’s initial) also based on a report by Justice Party fact-finding team. In the chronology, Republika said that “the first attack by

\(^\text{18}\) Partai Keadilan is an Islamic party founded after the fall of President Soeharto. It supported the reform movement in the country.
red headband troops on Sirisori residents was accompanied by the throwing of molotov cocktails…” In describing another incident it said that “The incident began at around 10:00 a.m. in Desa Batu Merah when a pregnant mother wearing a veil was forced to put off her veil.” On the same day, Republika printed an editorial entitled Ambon, Your Fate Now (Ambon, Riwayatmu Kini). It said that “Ambon seems to be chosen by political elites in the country as an arena to fight it out.” It continued, “the losers of the competition for political position in the bureaucracy now exploit religious sentiments.” And “political elites need an area of ‘struggle’ where they can win victory over others, but they try as much as possible that this space ‘won’t be too expensive’ nationally.”

There is a significant difference in Kompas’s and Republika’s reports at this time. Kompas continued to avoid mentioning particular group involvement in the conflict. In contrast, Republika became more partisan and used words and phrases which suggested that Muslims were the victims, as in the report that four IAIN students were “abducted and slaughtered cruelly” and “the first attack (was) by red headband troops on Sirisori residents.”

**Involvement of Security Forces in the Conflict: February 27 – March 3, 1999**

On February 27, 1999 the Republika headline read Religious Leaders Shouldn’t Be Caught Up in the Emotion of Residents (Pimpinan Agama Jangan Larut Emosi Bersama Warga) (esa, one, Antara). It said, “According to Republika’s source in Ambon, terror and looting still happen to Muslim families.” And “(security) apparatuses who have the same religion with one of the (conflicting) sides deliberately put off their uniforms to
shoot people from the rival religious faction… The military police are still investigating four police officers, Major Sergeant Siahaya from Buru Sergap Unit in Ambon Resort Police, Chief Sergeant Eddy Wattimena from Maluku Police Intelligent Service and his younger brother Waimena from Ambon Resort Police, and Chief Sergeant Bob Tumatala from Traffic Police (Ditlantas), who were seen in the crowd shooting Muslim civilians last Tuesday.” Republika said that “among the crowd last Wednesday (2/24) an RMS flag was found, and it was suspected that it came from families who lived near a church in Batu Merah Dalam. Among others who raised the RMS flag was Yohanes Noya who was caught red-handed. He is being investigated by a unit from the Military Resort Command.” Republika said that hundreds of residents led by Pastor Max Siahaya urged the government to withdraw the Ujungpandang-based Kostrad (Army Strategic Reserve Command) troops from Ambon. The demand, said Thamrin Eli¹⁹, did not make any sense (mengada-ada) and it could pit people against one another.

On March 3, 1999 the Republika headline read Ambon Still Gripped by Fear, Three Victims Claimed (Ambon Masih Mencekam, Tiga Korban Kembali Jatuh) (bsa, bid, dam). It said that “a Muslim resident was found dead in his house with stab wounds.” It quoted a task force from Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) that a Buton-native Muslim called La Ode Kaimudin (35) was “slaughtered by two rioters.” Aminah Kaimudin, Kaimudin’s daughter, said that she recognized the two killers with the initials P and M, who are residents of “Kampung Goga in Desa Kudamati, Sirimau, Ambon.” The second report was entitled Another Exodus Like Last May (Eksodus itu Mirip Saat Terjadi Kerusuhan Mei) (tar, pri, one, amb). It told about the flow of refugees from Ambon.

¹⁹ Thamrin Eli (Thamrin Ely) is the Maluku chapter of Indonesia Ulema Council (MUI) Deputy Chairman.
Muslim sources were mentioned in the story, including Siti Rohani, A. Alaydrus, Sangaji, Rustam Kastor and Ridwan Makasar, but no Christian sources were used. The third report was entitled *Ambon Again Flares Up – ABRI Again Charged (Ambon Kembali Bergolak – ABRI Lagi-lagi Dituding)* (tar, bud, pri, wid, uba). It said, Muslim residents complained that local security officers took the side of the non-Muslim group.”

According to Amien Rais, *Republika* said, there were three possible scenarios behind the Maluku conflict. Firstly, it was to divert people’s attention from former President Soeharto’s trial; secondly, it was to abort the 1999 General Election slated for June 7; and thirdly, it was to frighten people so that they would submit to the military after the civilian government had failed. *Republika* also quoted Muhammadiyah Chairman Syafii Maarif who stated that “an international group was participating in funding violence in Ambon” with the aim of “changing the composition of the population based on religion.”

On the same day, *Republika* printed an editorial entitled *Ambon Tragedy (Targedi Ambon)*. It said that “last Monday the tragedy climaxed. Tens of people who were performing dawn prayers at Al Huda Mosque, Ahuru area, Ambon town, were shot. Four people died, tens of others were injured.” It continued, “In this province riot is not just an interethnic clash. What has developed is Muslims versus Christians enmity. The situation has developed in such a way that there is a process of Muslim expulsion from Maluku. The flow of thousands of (Muslim) refugees out from Ambon has shown this.”

On March 2, 1999 *Kompas* reported the condition of refugees in an article entitled *Refugees, Resources for North Sulawesi (Pengungsi, Sumber Daya bagi Sultra)* (yas). It said that the refugees fled by ship to Baubau and some of them continued to Buton and Muna in South Sulawesi. As of February 23, 1999, the refugees numbered 18,391 people,
Kompas said. It quoted an interview with Ali Marinda from Panti Asuhan Muslimin (orphanage house) in Baubau.

On March 3, 1999 Kompas printed the headline On Shooting in Ambon – Police Deny Shooting Residents while Praying (Soal Penembakan di Ambon – Polisi Bantah Tembak Warga Saat Sembahyang) (msh, edu, ren, boy, zal, ely, osd, dis). In the report Kompas quoted a police spokesman who “strongly denied a number of print and electronic media reports that the police had shot people who were performing prayers in Muhajirin Mosque in Ambon, Monday morning.” According to the police, the people were found dead in Rinjani Village some 100 meters from the mosque and “were brought to Muhajirin Mosque, which was filled with the refugees.” According to Kompas, the dead victims included Armin Fa’ani, Mul Ikhrrom, Husain bin Umar, Usman Wakano, and John Dparlila, while the injured victims were Dullah Wabnebu, Kadir Pellu, Mat Rery, David Kastanya, Pieter Malau, and Berty Lumeten. Twenty six houses and a mosque were burned. Kompas said that people were gripped by fear because of rumors of abduction by a rival group. This fear became stronger when people found three more dead bodies in Dusun Air Kuning, Desa Batumerah in Ambon. The dead bodies were identified as Marlen Sitanala (a professor at the school of law at Pattimura University) from Kelurahan Wainitu, Kecamatan Nusaniwe; and Lukas Paliama from Desa Suli, Kecamatan Salahatu, Central Maluku. The third body was still unidentified.

There are significant differences in Republika’s and Kompas’s reports. Firstly, Republika accused the police of participating in attacks on Muslims, while Kompas quoting a police source denied that people were shot while performing dawn prayers at
the mosque.\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Kompas} showed that the victims in the mosque were not only Muslims but also Christians (from their names). Secondly, \textit{Kompas} avoided using “strong” words, while \textit{Republika} used “strong” words such as “slaughtered” and “Muslims” for identification. While describing Muslims as the victims, \textit{Republika} failed to quote Christian sources for balanced reporting.

\textbf{The Conflict Becomes National: March 4, 1999}

On March 4, 1999 \textit{Kompas} printed a headline entitled \textit{ABRI Commander in Chief Orders Maluku Police Chief Replaced} (\textit{Pangab Perintahkan Kapolda Maluku Diganti}) (osd, dis, nn, edu). It said that ABRI Commander in Chief General Wiranto had ordered the replacement of Maluku Police Chief Colonel (Pol) Karyono Sm, but the new chief had not been determined. On the same day \textit{Kompas} printed another report entitled \textit{Concerned Demonstration on Ambon Tragedy} (\textit{Demo Keprihatinan Tragedi Ambon}) (ti, nic, jun, nar, pin, gg). In this article \textit{Kompas} reported that Muslims nationwide protested against the shooting of Muslims in the mosque while performing prayers. The protests took place in Pekanbaru, Bali and Bandung.

On March 4, 1999 the \textit{Republika} headline read \textit{Maluku Police Chief Replaced – President: Ambon Rioters Are Muslim and Christian Radicals} (\textit{Kapolda Maluku Dicopot – Presiden: Pelaku Kerusuhan Ambon, Radikal Islam-Kristen}) (dam ris, poy, bid, bsa, tid, rin, nri). It reported the replacement of Colonel (Pol) Karyono S. and added that “the replacement was due to the finding regarding police personnel who shot people

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Kompas} said that the dawn prayer was performed at Muhajirin Mosque, while \textit{Republika} said it was performed at Al Huda Mosque.
performing dawn prayers last Monday.” Republika said, “It was reported that Christian residents planned to attack Muslim groups at Jl. Baru, Waihaong and the surrounding area” and continued that “almost all Muslim neighborhoods had been razed by fire.”

There are two significant differences in Kompas’s and Republika’s reports. Firstly, Kompas reported the replacement of Maluku Police Chief as if it had nothing to do with police involvement in the conflict, while Republika reported speculation that “the replacement was due to the finding regarding police personnel who shot people performing dawn prayers last Monday.” While Republika did not quote any authoritative source to support this speculation, the Republika report implies that the replacement was an indication that the shooting happened.

**From Trying to End the Conflict to Jihad: March 5 – March 12, 1999**

On March 5, 1999 Kompas printed an article entitled Amien Asks the US to Press the Indonesian Government to Stop the Violence (Untuk Hentikan Berbagai Kerusuhan – Amien Minta AS Tekan Pemerintah RI) (uu). In this report Kompas said that National Mandate Party (PAN) Chairman Amien Rais advocated asking the US government to press the Indonesian government to stop riots in the country. Amien was scheduled to meet with the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on March 5, 1999. On the same day, Kompas printed another report entitled Bugis Saman, New Maluku Police Chief (Bugis Saman, Kapolda Maluku Baru) (nn, mt, edu, sir, bb, yul, boy, pun, uu, ody, son, gg) on the replacement of Maluku Police Chief by Colonel (Pol) Bugis Saman. Kompas also reported continuing Muslim protests on the shooting in the mosque. The demonstrations by university students, according to Kompas, took place in Jakarta,
Jember, Ujungpandang, Bogor and Malang. In Jakarta, the Indonesian Committee for Muslim World Solidarity (KISDI) and Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) released statements regarding the incident.

On March 6, 1999 the Kompas headline read Demonstrations Demanding ABRI Take Responsibility – Ambon Tense Again (Demo Menuntut Pertanggungjawaban ABRI – Ambon Memanas Lagi) (Kompas team). In this report Kompas again reported the continuing Muslim protests on the shooting in the mosque. The protests took place in Tasikmalaya, Semarang, Solo, Bandung and Jakarta. Meanwhile in Ambon, Kompas said, the situation was getting tense again as people equipped themselves with “swords, arrows, spears and self-assembled weapons.” It said that “at 8:45 pm there was a big explosion surrounding Silo Church.”

On March 8, 1999 Kompas printed an editorial entitled If We Are Unable, the Help of Friends Is Not Bad (Bila Kita Sendiri Kedodoran, Sahabat Membantu Bukan Hal Jelek). This editorial quoted Amien Rais’s suggestion to ask for help from the US government and said that “if the authorities are incapable, for the sake of wider national interest, asking help from a friendly countries is clearly not a false alternative. If we ourselves are incapable, help from countries which have sympathy for Indonesia does make sense and it should not be seen as interference.”

On March 10, 1999 the Kompas headline read Ambon Conflict Resolution Enters New Phase (Penyelesaian Konflik Ambon Masuki Babak Baru) (mt, edu, nar, son, boy, nas, gg, pep, bw). It reported the establishment of an ABRI special team that consisted of 19 members who were Maluku natives. This “reconciliation team” was to “create security” and “was an early step toward peace.” Kompas also reported continuing protests
by Muslim groups in Semarang, Ujungpandag and Jakarta, which urged the government to stop the Maluku conflict. On the same day, Kompas printed another report entitled Hendropriyono: RMS behind the Ambon Riot (Hendropriyono: RMS di Balik Kerusuhan Ambon) (mt, edu, cc). Hendropriyono, who was a retired military officer and Minister of Transmigration in the Habibie cabinet, said that several RMS individuals who lived in the Netherlands had planned to break up Indonesia, especially Maluku. As proof for his statement, Hendropriyono said that on March 6-7, 1999 around 250 RMS activists held demonstrations in a number of cities in the Netherlands, including Den Haag, Amsterdam and Groningen. The RMS concept had spread to universities in Ambon, Hendropriyono said. In this report Kompas also reported denials of Hendropriyono’s statement by an Indonesian Christian Students Association leader, Phil Latumarissa, who asked Hendropriyono to prove his statement as ABRI had stated that there was no RMS involvement in the Maluku conflict. Kompas said that, “Maluku Governor M Saleh Latuconsina was not willing to comment.”

On March 11, 1999, in an article entitled High School Students Stage Concerned Action on Ambon Near Merdeka Palace (Pelajar Gelar Aksi Keprihatinan Ambon Dekat Istana Merdeka) (ush, ssd, yul, yas), Kompas reported that protests against the Ambon conflict had also been mounted by senior high school students. At the end of the article it reported the flow of refugees from Maluku to South Sulawesi which now numbered 30,000. On the same day Kompas printed another report entitled Time to Impose Civil Emergency in Ambon (Saatnya Penerapan Darurat Sipil di Ambon) (ely), and quoted Thamrin Eli’s suggestion that “civil emergency should be applied in Ambon.” The last article Kompas printed on this day was entitled Ambon Conflict Continues to Heat Up
(Konflik Ambon Terus Memanas) (mt, cc, edu, gg, nar, muk, eta, oki, dth). At the end of the article, Kompas quoted a Muslim group in Banten who said “we will hoist a jihad flag” if the Maluku conflict is not resolved.

On March 12, 1999 Kompas printed an editorial entitled Resolution of the Ambon Conflict Should Be the Priority of National Agenda (Penyelesaian Konflik di Ambon Harus Jadi Prioritas Agenda Nasional). Kompas said that “the conflict clearly involves religion and ethnicity” and questioned the role of the media in reporting the conflict. “On one hand, people said, yes, it is freedom of the press. Just report what happens. Firstly, this is not simple …to report what is. Secondly, (one should consider) how a report impacts the public.”

Republika on March 5, 1999 printed a report entitled Testimony of the Imam21 of the Al Fatah Mosque Ambon (Kesaksian Imam Masjid Al Fatah Ambon) (no journalist’s initial). The imam said that the conflict in Ambon had been started by a Christian. Quoting the imam, Republika said, “It was Yopie who hired a Bugis-native Muslim’s van (angkot, angkutan kota) with an agreed price and time (of return). But when the time was due, he (Yopie) broke the promise to pay. Finally Usman, assistant to the driver (kernet) who was assigned to ask for the money, got angry. And then the kernet was attacked and (he) ran away to Batu Merah for help.” The imam’s account was a Muslim version. Republika did not go to any Christian sources for balance. On the same day, Republika also printed a report entitled Resolve the Ambon Case Soon (Segera Selesaikan Kasus Ambon) (rys, ira, ban wid, amb, tid, yon, uba, as) which only interviewed Muslim sources.

21 Imam (Arabic) literally means “leader” but commonly used for “prayer leader” or the one who leads prayers.
On March 6, 1999 *Republika* printed the headline *Again, Muslim Shot in Ambon* (*Lagi, Warga Muslim Kena Tembak di Ambon*) (tid, hep, wid). It said that Ambon resident, Mohammad Reza Polahunu, who was shot tried to seek protection “but at Jalan Baru he was chased by rioters who lived in a church around 100 meters from the location.”

On March 10, 1999, the *Republika* headline read *ABRI Commander in Chief Admits Security Apparatuses Assigned in Ambon Unjust* (*Pangab Akui Aparat di Ambon Tak Adil*) (lid, jok, nin, amb, afa, rie, pry, eds, dar, uba). It said that Minister of Defense and Security/ABRI Commander in Chief General Wiranto had admitted that some ABRI personnel in Ambon were unjust while handling the conflict.

On March 11, 1999 *Republika* printed a headline entitled *Ria’s Refuge Ends in Depok* (*Pengungsian Ria Berakhir di Depok*) by Arys Hilman. This article was about a 30-year-old Muslim woman who became a refugee.

On March 12, 1999 the *Republika* headline read *Suaidi Regrets Gus Dur’s Statement – Local Ambon Security Apparatuses Withdrawn to Base Camp* (*Suaidi Sesalkan Pernyataan Gus Dur – Aparat Lokal Ambon Ditarik ke Pangkalan*) (bsa, tid, mms, ak, amb, bsa, Antara). In a report entitled *Facts Supporting Jihad* (*Fakta-fakta Pendorong Jihad*) (rif, vie) *Republika* reported a number of incidents where Muslims were attacked that might drive them to jihad, or holy war.

During this period *Kompas* promoted the idea of conflict resolution by urging the government to make it a priority (3/12/99), while *Republika* promoted the idea of Jihad, or the holy war, of Muslims against the Christians (3/12/99).
Among ways to resolve the conflict, Kompas proposed foreign intervention (3/5/99 – report, 3/8/99 – editorial) and the imposition of civil emergency status in the province (3/11/99). Kompas consistently viewed the conflict as purely an Indonesian problem that had nothing to do with other parties and did not accept the idea of RMS involvement in the conflict. Republika, on the other hand, shifted from suggesting that the conflict was due to a resurgence of RMS and promoted Jihad for Muslims, maintaining they had become the victims (3/5/99, 3/6/99, 3/11/99, 3/12/99). With the Jihad call, Republika showed that it had become a Muslim newspaper rather than a public newspaper. It defended the Muslims’ interests and failed to quote Christian sources for balanced reporting.

Summary and Chart

The following chart summarizes the difference in Kompas and Republika reports of January 19 – March 12, 1999:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reports of January 19-March 12, 1999</th>
<th>Kompas</th>
<th>Republika</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First reports / January 21, 1999</td>
<td>Implied Christians were the victims; put number of the victims in the middle section of the article.</td>
<td>Implied Muslims were the victims; put number of the victims at end of the article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second report / January 22, 1999</td>
<td>Reported condition in Ambon still tense; did not report on the RMS.</td>
<td>Reported condition in Ambon normal; reported on the RMS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third report / January 23, 1999</td>
<td>Counted less victims; reported that not all people were involved in the riot; did not use specific term for the victims.</td>
<td>Counted more victims; reported that the Ambon conflict had connection with the Ketapang hoodlums; used the word “Muslims” for the victims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth report / January 24, 1999</td>
<td>Reported relatively similar</td>
<td>Reported relatively similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Associated with Republika</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>with Republika.</td>
<td>with Republika.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fifth report</td>
<td>Reported the conflict almost every day; used the word “aid” which had multi-interpreations; implied the conflict was engineered by the third party; carefully reported the finding of guns and ammunition in the warring areas by quoting military source for balance reporting.</td>
<td>Did not print any single report.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sixth report</td>
<td>Reported the blockade of Komnas HAM members by unidentified persons; did not identify Albert Hasibuan as a Christian while other Komnas HAM members were Muslims; implied “Islamization” took place in Maluku by reporting that 225,000 Muslims lived in Maluku, of whom 30,000 people live in Ambon.</td>
<td>Reported the blockade of Komnas HAM members by unidentified persons; did not identify Hasibuan as a Christian while other Komnas HAM members were Muslims; reported how prone Ambon was to violence (even two hours before six cabinet ministers visited Ambon, some riots still erupted); reported more churches (19) than mosques (12) burned.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seventh report</td>
<td>Reported the identity of Ma, a suspected rioter, who was from Bone, South Sulawesi (Muslim).</td>
<td>Implied Muslims were the targets of the riot, but pointed finger at “provocateurs” rather than the Christians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth report</td>
<td>Focused on the riot in Haruku island, but did not make any reference to the religion of the victims; reported the response of President Habibie but ignored the impact of Haruku clash in Ambon and the burning and looting of Muslims’ belongings; omitted to report the possibility of the</td>
<td>Quoted Muslim sources but failed to quote Christian sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td></td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ninth report / Feb 17-23, 1999</td>
<td>Printed reports almost every day; implied the “Islamization” of Maluku by reporting that majority of the population was Muslim (59.01 percent).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Did not print any report.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenth report / Feb 24, 1999</td>
<td>Used “moderate” words such as “intergroup suspicion” rather than “Muslim-Christian suspicion.”</td>
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<td>Used strong words such as “mosque” and “slaughtered.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eleventh report / Feb 26, 1999</td>
<td>Avoided mentioning particular group involved in the conflict.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Became more partisan by using words and phrases which implied Muslims were the victims.</td>
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<td>Twelfth report / Feb 27-March 3, 1999</td>
<td>Failed to accuse the police of participating in shooting Muslims while performing dawn prayer; avoided strong words.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accused the police of participating in shooting Muslims while performing dawn prayer; used strong words such as “slaughtered” and “Muslims.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thirteenth report / March 4, 1999</td>
<td>Reported the replacement of Maluku Police Chief as if it had nothing to do with the police involvement in the dawn prayer shooting; implied that the dawn prayer shooting was not committed by the police.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Speculated that the replacement of the Maluku Police Chief had something to do with the police involvement in the dawn prayer shooting; implied that the shooting by the police took place, although it did not quote any authoritative sources.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourteenth report / March 5-12, 1999</td>
<td>Promoted the idea of conflict resolution; did not accept the idea of RMS involvement in the conflict.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoted the idea of Jihad; failed to quote Christian sources for balanced reporting.</td>
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</table>
CHAPTER 3

Conclusion

This section attempts to answer the research questions posed earlier. The first question is, do the two newspapers count the victims of the conflict in the same way; if not which paper counts more, and why? Kompas and Republika reports were mostly the same. However, in a few cases they differed in counting the number of the victims. For example, on the reports of January 23, 1999 Republika counted more victims than Kompas. The reason for Republika to count more is likely because there were more Muslim victims in this early period of the conflict. By reporting more, Republika tried to attract the government’s attention to the seriousness of the conflict.

The second question is, do the two newspapers assess conditions in the conflict area similarly or differently? The two newspapers differed in assessing conditions in Ambon. For example, in the report of January 22, 1999, Kompas said that conditions in Ambon were tense while Republika said that conditions were normal. I suggest that Republika’s assessment was to create a good image for President Habibie’s administration which was in power at that time.

The third question is, do the two newspapers give emphasis to some issues while at the same time neglecting other issues; and which issues are emphasized and which ones are neglected? There are a number of issues discussed in the two newspapers’ reports which clearly indicate their partisanship. Kompas tried to avoid issues it believed could make the image of Christians worse and emphasized issues it believed could improve the
Christians’ image. On the other hand, Republika did the same thing in defending Muslims. Some of the issues are:

1. Kompas avoids reporting the RMS, Republika reports the RMS intensively.
2. Kompas puts the number of the victims at the middle section of its report, Republika puts it at the end section of its report.
3. Kompas reports that Ambon is under curfew (still tense), while Republika says that the town is normal.
4. Kompas uses “moderate” or “neutral” words to avoid adding heat to the conflict, Republika uses “strong” words that potentially can worsen the conflict.
5. Kompas continuously reports the conflict and regards conditions as “newsworthy,” while Republika does not, regarding the conflict as “un-newsworthy.”
6. Kompas avoids reporting the conflict as a result of a “grand design,” while Republika promotes the conflict as a result of a “grand design.”
7. Kompas avoids reporting the involvement of the security forces in the conflict, or at least does not indicate it explicitly, while Republika explicitly reports the involvement of the security forces.
8. Kompas promotes conflict resolution to end the war, Republika promotes jihad for Muslims.

The fourth question is, do the two papers print reports on the conflict every day, or, do they regard some of the events and incidents in the conflict as no longer important and newsworthy? The two papers differed in assessing whether conditions in Maluku were still newsworthy or no longer important. Republika did not print any reports from
January 25 to January 31, 1999, while Kompas printed reports almost every day. Republika did not print any reports from February 17-February 23, 1999, while Kompas printed reports almost every day. I suggest that Republika’s failure to print reports during these periods was likely because it no longer considered the conflict as important and newsworthy, and it also tried to create good image for President Habibie. By not reporting the conflict, Republika most likely expected that the public would assume that conditions in the province were alright. It is unlikely that technical problems caused Republika’s failure of reporting.

The fifth question is, do the two newspapers apply the same journalistic standard in reporting the Maluku conflict? Kompas and Republika differed in assessing which news is regarded as newsworthy and which one is not. This has been proved by the fact that some of the same news are put in different degrees of newsworthiness by the two newspapers. For example, on the report of January 21, 1999 Kompas put number of the victims at the middle of its report (important) while implying Christians were the victims, while Republika put it at the end of its report (less important) while implying Muslims were the victims.

There appears to be significant difference in the journalistic standard for reporting by Kompas and Republika. The sectarianism of Republika was more evident. The lower quality of Republika’s journalism appears to have resulted from their determination to defend and promote Muslim interests. Kompas played sectarian politics to a lesser extent. Kompas reports were written in such a way that readers would “read between the lines” to find the sectarianism. Republika felt justified voicing Muslim perspectives because Muslims are the majority and Muslims should take the lead in the country. Thus, it was
not a “sin” or a “mistake” to report the Maluku conflict with this assumption and “prejudice.” While *Kompas* reported the conflict with implicit sectarianism, it appears to have applied the New Order standard of not talking about SARA. *Kompas* is a Catholic newspaper in a Muslim majority country. This minority position makes *Kompas* play safe while at the same time trying to send its messages effectively.

The difference in the two newspapers’ reporting raises a fundamental question: why did the two newspapers report the same event, namely, the Maluku sectarian conflict, differently? To answer it, two approaches are employed here. First, I explore the philosophical framework underpinning the theory of interpretation that may explain the difference in the newspapers’ reports, and second, I discuss the political economy of the two newspapers as influencing their reports.

Working as a journalist, I experienced how a report is constructed by the way we interpret or give meaning to reality or an event. An event never stands alone for itself, but it always refers to a meaning outside itself in line with the worldview or attitudes of the interpreter. Reality is not objective in itself, but it is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Reality is understood and constructed through a process of social interaction among community members. Values are formed through convention among people.

A and B alone are responsible for having constructed this world. A and B remain capable of changing or abolishing it. What is more, since they shaped this world in the course of a shared biography which they can remember, the world thus shaped appears fully transparent to them. They understand the world that they themselves have made. All this changes in the process of transmission to the new generation. The objectivity of the institutional world “thickens” and “hardens,” not only for the children, but (by a mirror effect) for the parents as well (Berger and Luckmann 1967:59).
The two newspapers realized well this social axiom and the effects it can create. That is why they optimized – or even exploited – the power of the press to construct reality in line with the worldview they believe. Although *Kompas* and *Republika* may have tried to assure readers that they were “neutral” in reporting the Maluku conflict, the “religious” biases of both papers are still there. *Kompas* could not avoid its “Christianness,” while *Republika* could not avoid its “Mulsimness.”

The theory of interpretation, known as hermeneutics, can be applied in studying a text and also can be applied to events which must be interpreted. Based on this approach, the Maluku conflict is a text which is open for interpretation, resulting in differences in *Kompas’s* and *Republika’s* reports. As has been shown by the study, the two newspapers’ difference reflected their “religious” affiliation. *Kompas* tended to defend Christian interests and perspective, while *Republika* tended to defend Muslim interests and perspective.

This “religious” affiliation is a “given” thing that can not be avoided. It may be considered an assumption that forms how people perceive or understand things and reality. Hermeneutic thinker Hans-Georg Gadamer (Gadamer 1975) argues that one’s perception and, to some extent, knowledge of reality is formed or constructed by his/her presuppositions. Gadamer calls this a “prejudice” and argues that this “prejudice” should be rehabilitated (1975:245). He says,

What is necessary is a fundamental rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice and a recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices, if we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being (Gadamer 1975:246).
For Gadamer, the negative meaning of “prejudice” is the result of the enlightenment critique of belief and emphasis on reason. He argues that “prejudice” should have a neutral meaning. In short, readers should recognize there is no “objective” truth, and any report is a version of events informed by prejudice.

The problem of “prejudice” in journalism is embedded in who produces a report. Edward Said has eloquently described how the Western press covers Islam with an embedded “prejudice.” He argues that the Western press sees Islam through Western values (Said 1997). There is always a hidden agenda behind a report. In the words of Said, the Western press is carrying out a form of cultural imperialism (Said 1993) which “brainwashes” the rest of the world so that they will follow how the West thinks and understands the world. The West’s project of orientalism is part of this agenda (Said 1978).

Said’s criticisms of the Western press might be employed here to understand the Kompas and Republika reports. The perspectives that shape the two newspapers’ reports are clear enough, namely, to defend their readers’ interests. Thus, the two papers’ reports are not value-free.

The philosophical framework discussed above seems to be incomplete without grounded theory. The second factor that might explain the two newspapers’ difference in reporting is political economy or, specifically, the power behind the papers. Central to this point is the ownership of the papers. There is no data available on how many percent of the shares Jakob Oetama controls at Kompas-Gramedia, but as Hill notes,

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22 To some extent, individuals within the news organizations may play crucial role, but this paper does not explore such an area.
Yakob Utama\textsuperscript{23} still heads the empire, which has generated for him an enormous personal wealth warranting his listing as the 120\textsuperscript{th} largest personal tax-payer in 1991 (Hill 1994:84).

*Kompas* editorials are widely believed to be deeply influenced by Jakob’s Javanese style of avoiding confrontation with the ruler and taking moderate political positions.

*Republika’s* shares are mostly controlled by ICMI which steers the paper’s editorial policy. This has made *Republika* the mouthpiece of ICMI which represents middle class Muslims. For ICMI, *Republika* was meant to further Muslim emergence as a politically important group after a long time when Muslims had been marginalized by the New Order regime. Adding to the strong advocacy and “partisanship” of *Republika* for a Muslim perspective is the nature of its staff. All reporters, editorial board members, as well as administrative staff at *Republika* are Muslims. It is said that lately *Republika* has begun recruiting people from other religious affiliations, but this seems not to have had much influence on its reporting of the Maluku conflict.

**The Changing Role of the Press in Indonesia**

During the New Order, the Indonesian press functioned as a form of “development communications” emphasizing the importance of social transformation and development through economic growth with the media as a tool of communication (Kitley 2001:259). Unfortunately, this role involved one-way communication, namely, from the government to the people. The government did not have any feedback from the people. As a result, the government’s programs often did not reflect the needs of the people.

\textsuperscript{23} Yakob Utama is the new spelling rule based on the Indonesian Revised Spelling (EYD) implemented since 1972. But generally the Indonesian writing style does not change proper names in line with this new spelling rule.
people. The state’s control over the press ruined the critical aspect of the press. As

Schwarz points out,

The government’s control of the press also has had a major influence on the “public language” of Indonesia. The language of journalists has become infused with “bureaucrat-speak” and riddled with the jargon of development. Euphemisms and acronyms become the best available substitute of truth; precision of expression -- and perhaps precision of thought as well – suffer. The bureaucracy enjoys a powerful influence over Indonesian journalism because it is the source of most news (Schwarz 1994:242).

The New Order amputated some of the crucial roles of the press in order to maintain – in the word of the regime – stability (keamanan dan ketertiban, security and order), but its actual aim was to maintain power by eliminating those brave enough to challenge the regime. Since the fall of Soeharto, a new ideal based on “the free market of ideas” has been heralded by the press. A position is to be tested and contested through nationwide discourse.

Many commentators have noted that the long-time rule of the New Order which marginalized the press has contributed to the “infant” characteristic of the press today. When the regime fell in 1998, the media mushroomed, voicing different political and economic interests. The reporting of Kompas and Republika should be understood in this wider context. The euphoria that prevailed during the heyday of the reformasi era in 1998-99 did not include the ideal of “good” journalism. The Indonesian press lacked a tradition of reporting “the news as it is” and was “nervous” in encountering the wind of change when Soeharto’s regime collapsed. Indonesian journalism was forced to reconsider its role in dealing with the country’s transition to democracy.
The shift from a repressed journalism to a liberal one is not easy to accomplish. The Indonesian press needs time to adjust to new conditions. The historicity and religious background of the two papers had formed the two institutions with certain characteristics which made their differences rather obvious. The politics of editorship in Kompas and Republika were driven by primordial and fundamental religious beliefs. Rather than becoming part of the solution, the two papers positioned themselves as part of the problem in the Maluku conflict.

The two newspapers’ “partisanship” is clearly described by anthropologist Niels Mulder:

As can be expected, partisan newspapers will give certain weight to matters preoccupying the minds of their readership, and thus there is no cause for wonder that Republika and Kompas give attention to religious matters (Mulder 2000:141).

As this paper shows, reporting in Kompas and Republika reflected sectarian interests. The disadvantages of such sectarian politics are clear. It distorts reality with a certain das sollen and it exacerbates the (Maluku) conflict.24 Press coverage gave fuel to the rising emotion among Muslims, especially radical Muslims such as Laskar Jihad. The arrival of Laskar Jihad (warriors of holy war) in Maluku during April-June 2000 is an example of the worsening conditions in the province. Laskar Jihad went to Maluku after it was reported nationwide that Muslims were under siege, and followers of Laskar Jihad

24 Jakob Oetama, editor of Kompas, said, "I felt very sad and guilty when conflicts, disturbances and separatist activities took place in several areas such as Ambon in Maluku, Sampit (Kalimantan) and most recently in Poso in Sulawesi. A widely-circulated paper like Kompas and other prominent publications could be doing something more substantial to stop them rather than exposing and covering the disturbances only from a news angle" (“Media Gets Rap for Fueling Nation's Woes” by Rita A.Widiadana, The Jakarta Post, 01/27/2002).
concluded that Muslims in Maluku needed armed assistance to fight against the Christians.\textsuperscript{25}

**Reflections**

As an organization which provides the public with information, a news organization is expected to show the people the world as it is (\textit{das sein}), not the world it wants to be (\textit{das sollen}). But in fact, this journalistic ideal cannot be found. As has been argued by Berger and Luckmann (1967), reality is socially constructed, while hermeneutics theorizes that the way we construct reality is based on our worldview.

Politics in the press seems unavoidable, because the press is not a sterile space of objectivity. A crucial question to be posed here is, how far the press should play politics and whether it is justified to do so in its role as an organization that serves the public. A political bias in the press might be justified if it serves the interest of the public at large and serves humanity. For example, in the name of the humanity, the press might be justified to hide the identities of AIDS and HIV-contaminated victims. In the name of the public interest, the press might be justified to wage a war against corruption and the abuse of power. But playing politics which only benefits one group of people creates problem. Sectarian politics tends to fragment people into groups and emphasize differences rather than similarities. This makes it difficult to sustain the unity of a country with diversity.

Given the impossibility of objectivity in news reporting, there is an inherent dilemma for those who are trying to report the news on such conflict. For some, the

\textsuperscript{25} Another reason why Laskar Jihad also went to Maluku is President Abdurrahman Wahid’s statement that only the people themselves could resolve the conflict in Maluku. Laskar Jihad took this statement as an indication of the government’s unwillingness to resolve the conflict.
journalist’s solution is the method of “skepticism” which questions every fact and event it covers. A journalist is doomed to bear “doubt,” even of the truth he or she perceives. The journalist can only try to prove and verify that each fact and event are really true.

A second solution to the dilemma is for readers to recognize that news reporting is biased. Because the “truth” of one news organization is different from other news organizations, people must read all the news and construct their understanding of events from the “fragmented truths.”

A third solution is for newspapers to accept as their responsibility the task of nation building in a country which is relatively young such as Indonesia. This is what social scientists call taking “social responsibility” for the reports they produce.

The debate on the role of the press takes time, as political and economic interests, religious groups, and other social entities struggle for power, but this paper argues that the press should transcend particular interests and seek to report in a way that benefits humanity as a whole or the public interests of the nation.

The Indonesian press has much space to play a significant role in state affairs in line with a strong determination to pursue democracy. The momentum is there now, but it depends on the press workers to determine the role of the press for the future. As the Indonesian adage *tak ada kata terlambat*\(^{26}\) says, it is never too late to prepare and do good things. And it is not too late to make the press a credible source of information without much “prejudice.”

\(^{26}\) It is never too late (literally, “no words for lateness”).
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